



## Postpartum Sexual Health with Dr Deirdre O'Malley: Video 1

[00:00] Music

[00:07] What is postpartum sexual health?

[00:11] So, sexual health after the birth of your baby. It's complex there's lots of dimensions to it. Immediately, women and healthcare professionals tend to go straight to the physical aspects, so things like when to resume sexual intercourse after the baby has been born. Things like sexual desire or orgasm. Those types of things tend to come to people's minds immediately but in actual fact it's more complex. Relationship issues are important so how the couple communicate with each other, how they share out household and baby responsibilities. The other thing that's come out as being really important are psychological issues, so how women feel about their body and their body image. How women adapt to their new role as a mother and as a parent and how they cope with that extreme tiredness and exhaustion that's associated with becoming a parent for the first time.

[01:06] When are women resuming sexual activity after birth?

[01:09] Well you know what it's different for everybody some women resumed sexual activity around four/five weeks after birth, some women delayed it until twelve or sixteen weeks and other women waited a year until they felt comfortable having sexual activity. Our data has shown that three months after birth about two-thirds of women had resumed some form of sexual activity. But in saying that there was still one-fifth of women who had not resumed any form of sexual activity three months after birth.

[01:39] Are women experiencing sexual health issues after the birth of their

[01:43] Well the short answer is yes. The MAMMI study has shown us that, three months after birth one in two women are experiencing pain during sexual intercourse, a lack of vaginal lubrication and a loss of interest in sexual activity. 25 percent of women are experiencing problems with orgasm and some women are reporting a sense of vaginal tightness or vaginal looseness.

But that's the short answer, the long answer is actually a lot more reassuring, our data shows that there is a steady decrease in the number of women experiencing sexual health issues as time went by. So, 12 months after birth for most women those sexual health issues had resolved.

However, there is an important finding that needs to be shared. 40 percent or two in five women experience a loss of interest in sexual activity, 12 months after their first baby was born. But on the other hand, 70 percent of women said that overall they were satisfied with their sexual life. So that tells me that postpartum sexual health is more than just physical issues like sexual desire or achieving orgasm. It actually encompasses those other things like relationship issues and psychological issues.



While these videos are predominately about sexual health after your baby is born, there's one finding that really surprised us and I want to share. In the 12 months before women got pregnant one-third said that they experienced pain during sexual intercourse and we didn't expect that finding at all, so that's something that we'll look into at another date.

**[03:18]** Is anybody more risk of developing sexual health issues after birth?

**[03:22]** As part of the MAMMI study we looked at a variety of things that might contribute to developing sexual health issues after the birth of your first baby. We looked at things like how your baby was born, so for example did you have a vaginal birth or an instrumental birth or maybe a caesarean section. We looked at whether women had a perineal tear, whether they had sutures, whether they didn't have sutures, and we put all that into a model to see were any women more at risk of developing sexual health issues than others. And there was three things that stood out.

First of all, women who experience pain during sexual intercourse before they got pregnant were more likely to experience sexual health issues 6 months and 12 months after the baby was born. Women who were breastfeeding their baby were more likely to experience sexual health issues 6 months and 12 months after their baby was born. And women who had a poor perception of their body image were more likely to experience sexual health issues again at 6 months and 12 months after their baby was born.

So, the things that people might assume might lead to sexual health issues, like the way your baby was born or having tears, in the long term didn't actually influence whether women had sexual health issues or not. And I think that's a really important message that women get.

**[04:44]** So, in the next video I'm going to talk about what women told me they did to maintain intimacy and sexual activity in their relationship after their baby was born.